

The art of cargo surveying

By William Armbruster

John Tichenor was teaching photography at the Maryland Institute of Art in 1980 when an uncle who was in the steamship business suggested that he would make a good marine surveyor because of his skills as a photographer.

"He convinced me to take some courses in admiralty law," said Tichenor, who has a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Jacksonville University and a master's degree in fine arts from the Maryland Institute, with a specialty in photography.

"There are no courses for surveyors. I think an art background is as good as anything because you're taught how to look at things," he said.

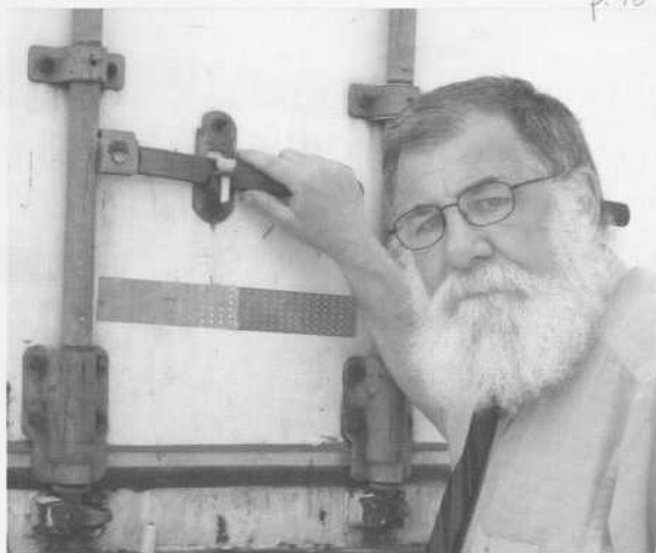
And look he does. As a senior staff surveyor for ACE USA Commercial Marine, part of the insurance firm ACE USA, Tichenor performs loss and damage surveys and theft investigations of steamship, airline and truck cargo.

His areas of expertise include the garment industry, fine arts, pharmaceuticals and the seafood industry as well as cargo security.

Tichenor, who spent 15 years as a marine surveyor with CIGNA Property Casualty before joining ACE in 1999, puts his photographer's eye to work when he checks the seals designed to indicate whether the security of the container has been compromised.

The best way for shippers to protect their cargo is to place a high-quality seal on the container, such as bolt and cable-type seals, he said. On outbound shipments, people should ensure that the seal number is on all documents, that they get the name of the person who applied the seal and the time the driver picked it up. In addition, they should check the driver's identification card. "A lot of people take pictures of the driver or even fingerprint the first time," Tichenor said.

Receivers should follow many of the same procedures, taking



John Tichenor of ACE USA Commercial Marine stresses the importance of using quality seals on cargo containers.

special care to ensure that the number on the seal matches the number on the documents. If ACE's clients have a problem with the seal, Tichenor instructs them to place it on the photocopier and then fax the copy to the other party, asking if this is the seal they put on.

Time differences often make it difficult for shippers to check with their overseas partner when they think the seal has been tampered with. When it's daytime in the U.S., it's nighttime in other areas of the world. So it can be 24 hours or more before the parties to a transaction can determine that cargo has been stolen, he said.

Seals cannot be reused, but he recommends that receivers hang on to them for 90 days so that investigators can inspect them in case of cargo theft. After that, they should toss the seals. Seals are not placed on empty containers or trailers.

Concerns over cargo theft and the risk of terrorism have combined to make companies more aware of the importance of quality seals. "If people were advised in the past to buy a better-quality seal, there would be a lot of 'hemming and hawing' because of the price," he said. But that has changed. "People don't want their shipment to be a target. And they don't want their product to be part of an incident."